

MAY FESTIVAL

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For Immediate Release

First weekend of 2016 May Festival (May 20-22) features award-winning soloists, two world premieres, rich choral music *2016 Festival honors Maestro James Conlon's extraordinary 37-year tenure*

CINCINNATI, OH – The 2016 May Festival, which celebrates and concludes **Music Director James Conlon's** 37-year tenure, kicks off on **Friday, May 20 (8 p.m.)** at **Cincinnati Music Hall** with **Mozart's** exquisite **"Great" Mass in C minor**. With its grandiose choruses, pristine virtuosity for soloists and soaring expressiveness, this is one of the composer's most-beloved works. Also on the program are Mozart's *Ave verum corpus* and *Exsultate jubilate*. **Soprano Lisette Oropesa, mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong** (who has recently received rave reviews for her recent performances as Calbo in *Maometto* at the Canadian Opera Company), **tenor Ben Bliss and baritone John Cheek** bring their artistry to these masterpieces along with the **May Festival Chorus** (professionally-trained chorus composed primarily of dedicated volunteer singers from around the Tri-state) and **Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra**, all led by Maestro Conlon.



On the second day of the Festival (**8 p.m. Saturday, May 21 at Music Hall**), jealousy, deceit and passion fuel **Verdi's** epic *Otello*. Mr. Conlon has long held an affinity for Verdi's operas, and first conducted a complete *Otello* with the May Festival in 1987. Bringing Shakespeare's characters to life alongside the May Festival Chorus and CSO are tenor **Gregory Kunde** (*Otello*), soprano **Tamara Wilson** (*Desdemona*), baritone **Egils Silins** (*Iago*), tenor **Ben Bliss** (*Cassio*), mezzo-soprano **Sara Murphy** (*Emilia*), tenor **Rodrick Dixon** (*Roderigo*) and baritone **John Cheek** (*Lodovico, Montano, the Herald*). Mr. Kunde was recently (May 15) named "Best Male Singer" at the 2016 International Opera Awards, the world's most important opera prizes. Additionally, Ms. Wilson received the 2016 Richard Tucker Award, one of the most prestigious prizes in opera, in large part due to the acclaim she's received for her performances of Verdi heroines. These award winners lead an all-star cast for Saturday's performance.

The Festival continues at **8 p.m. Sunday, May 22**, when Mr. Conlon and May Festival Youth Chorus director **James Bagwell** both conduct an annual performance at one of the country's most exquisite spaces, the **Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption** in Covington, Kentucky. This concert remains a regular favorite of the May Festival since introduced by Mr. Conlon in 1980.

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On the program are two **world premieres** of commissioned works by **Julia Adolphe** (*Sea Dream Elegies*) and **Alvin Singleton** (*Prayer*), nodding to Mr. Conlon's longstanding championship of new works and contemporary composers. Ms. Adolphe, hailed as being "alive with invention," (*The New Yorker*) has burst onto the compositional scene with works ranging from chamber operas to orchestral pieces, and recently co-produced *The Prodigal Son*, conducted by Mr. Conlon at the LA Opera. Mr. Singleton, a lifelong friend of Mr. Conlon's, previously composed *PraiseMaker* in honor of the May Festival's 125th anniversary in 1998. The **May Festival Youth Chorus** performs along with the May Festival Chorus.



Throughout the performances, audience members will experience May Festival traditions such as pre-concert recitals with the soloists, fanfare trumpets, a May Pole in the lobby, and young flower presenters on stage during the applause. The Festival will continue at Music Hall on May 27-28, the final performances in the building prior to its renovation.

Mr. Conlon is the longest-serving artistic leader in May Festival history, and among the longest-tenured music directors of any major classical music institution in the country. The 2016 May Festival pays homage to Mr. Conlon's unprecedented tenure, with programs that recall artistic milestones and audience favorites from the past four decades. The annual choral festival dates back 143 years. After this season, Mr. Conlon will be named May Festival **Music Director Laureate** and continue to have a presence conducting in Cincinnati both with the May Festival and the CSO.

The 2016 May Festival will also be the final Festival (and the final performances by any organization) to take place in Cincinnati's historic Music Hall prior to its planned renovation. The 2017 May Festival will take place at the Taft Theatre in downtown Cincinnati while Music Hall is under construction, while the 2018 May Festival will be back in a newly-revitalized Music Hall.

Ticket Information

Four-concert subscriptions start at \$88 and are still available. Single tickets start at \$12 and are available now. Call the Box Office at 513.381.3300 or visit mayfestival.com for details and ordering.



James Conlon, Music Director

James Conlon, one of today's most versatile and respected conductors, has cultivated a vast symphonic, operatic and choral repertoire. Since his 1974 debut with the New York Philharmonic, he has conducted virtually every major American and European symphony orchestra. Through worldwide touring, an extensive discography and videography, numerous essays and commentaries, frequent television appearances and guest speaking engagements, Mr. Conlon is one of classical music's most recognized interpreters.

Mr. Conlon is Music Director of the Los Angeles Opera and the Cincinnati May Festival, America's oldest choral festival. This season he brings to a close a 37-year tenure of the May Festival, one of the longest tenures of any American classical music institutions, and becomes Conductor Laureate. He also takes the post of Principal Conductor of the RAI National Symphony Orchestra in Torino, Italy in 2016. Mr. Conlon has served as Music Director of the Ravinia Festival, summer home of the Chicago Symphony (2006-2015), Principal Conductor of the Paris National Opera (1995-2004); General Music Director of the City of Cologne, Germany (1989-2002), where he was Music Director of both the Gürzenich Orchestra-Cologne Philharmonic and the Cologne Opera; and Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic (1983-1991). Mr. Conlon has conducted more than 270 performances at the Metropolitan Opera since his debut there in 1976. He has also conducted at Teatro alla Scala, Wiener Staatsoper, Mariinsky Theatre, Royal Opera at Covent Garden in London, Teatro del Opera di Roma, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

At the Los Angeles Opera, where he has been Music Director since 2006, Mr. Conlon has conducted 48 different operas including 23 company premieres, two U.S. premieres and one world premiere. Highlights of his tenure include conducting the first *Ring* cycle in Los Angeles, initiating the groundbreaking Recovered Voices series, and spearheading Britten 100/LA, a city-wide celebration honoring the centennial of the composer's birth. His pre-concert lectures at the Los Angeles Opera consistently attract capacity crowds.

During the coming season at the Los Angeles Opera, Mr. Conlon conducts Verdi's *Macbeth*, Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Strauss's *Salome* and Puccini's *Tosca*. This summer he opens the Italian Spoleto Festival with *The Marriage of Figaro*, the second opera of a three year Mozart Da Ponte Trilogy and returns to conduct the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra in St. Petersburg.

Mr. Conlon marked his final season as Music Director of the Ravinia Festival in the summer of 2015 with programming that celebrated his 11-year tenure including Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* and works by Zemlinsky, Mahler, Mozart, Shostakovich, and *Tchaikovsky*; and during the 2015-2016 season he returned to conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Orchestra Hall. His upcoming orchestral engagements include conducting the San Francisco Symphony, Montreal Symphony, National Symphony and New World Symphony in North America, and the RAI National Symphony Orchestra in Italy and on tour in China.

Other recent European engagements have included leading the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre National de France, and the New Year's concert for live television in Venice's Teatro La Fenice.

In an effort to raise awareness of the significance of the lesser-known works of composers silenced by the Nazi regime, Conlon has devoted himself to extensive programming of this music throughout Europe and North America. In 2013 he was awarded the Roger E. Joseph Prize at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for his extraordinary efforts to eradicate racial and religious prejudice and discrimination, in 2007 he received the Crystal Globe Award from the Anti-Defamation League, and in 1999 he received the Zemlinsky Prize for his efforts in bringing that composer's music to international attention. His work on behalf of suppressed composers led to the creation of The OREL Foundation, an invaluable resource on the topic for music lovers, students, musicians and scholars, and the Ziering-Conlon Initiative for Recovered Voices at the Colburn School. His appearances throughout the country as a speaker on a variety of cultural and educational topics are widely praised.

Mr. Conlon's extensive discography and videography can be found on the Bridge, Capriccio, Decca, EMI, Erato, and Sony Classical labels. He has won two Grammy Awards for Best Classical Album and Best Opera Recording for the Los Angeles Opera recording of Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. His latest recordings, released by Bridge Records in the spring of 2016, include John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles* with Los Angeles Opera and the May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Symphony in Nathaniel Dett's oratorio, *The Ordering of Moses* at Carnegie Hall.

Mr. Conlon was among the five initial recipients of the Opera News awards and was honored by The New York Public Library as a "Library Lion." His other honors include a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Los Angeles (2010), the Music Institute of Chicago's Dushkin Award (2009), the Medal of the American Liszt Society (2008) and Italy's Premio Galileo 2000 Award for his significant contribution to music, art and peace in Florence (2008). He holds three honorary doctorates. Mr. Conlon was named Commandeur de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture and, in 2002, he received the Légion d'Honneur, France's highest distinction, from then-President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac.

Ensembles

May Festival Chorus

The May Festival Chorus has earned acclaim locally, nationally and internationally for its musicality, vast range of repertoire and sheer power of sound. The Chorus of 145 professionally trained singers is the core artistic element of the Cincinnati May Festival as well as the official chorus of the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestra. Throughout each season the chorus members collectively devote more than 40,000 hours in rehearsals and performances.



Founded in 1873, the annual May Festival is the oldest, and one of the most prestigious, choral festivals in the Western Hemisphere. The annual Festival boasts the May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra as anchors, hosts an international array of guest artists and presents two spectacular weekends of dynamic programming under the musical leadership of James Conlon and choral preparation of Robert Porco. James Conlon has provided the artistic leadership for more May Festivals than any other Music Director in the

Festival's 141-year history. Many important choral works have received their World and American premieres at the May Festival, including Johann Sebastian Bach's *Magnificat*, Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 3, Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana*, Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* and Robert Nathaniel Dett's *The Ordering of Moses*.

Beyond Cincinnati, the May Festival Chorus has performed with great success at numerous venues across the country, including four celebrated appearances at Carnegie Hall, the most recent performance being in May of 2014 for the Spring for Music Festival, with James Conlon and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

The May Festival Chorus has further strengthened its national presence through numerous PBS broadcasts of live concerts and several award-winning recordings, many in collaboration with the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestra. In 2001 the Chorus recorded *Christmas with the May Festival Chorus*, a popular *a cappella* holiday compact disc. Their 2004 Telarc release, the world premiere recording of Franz Liszt's *St. Stanislaus* featuring James Conlon and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, was awarded the 30th International F. Liszt Record Grand Prix by the Liszt Society of Budapest. The Chorus is also featured on the 2012 Cincinnati Pops release, *Home for the Holidays*.

The May Festival Chorus has garnered two awards in recognition of its continuing artistic excellence and performances throughout the state. In 2011 the Chorus received the Spirit of Cincinnati USA Erich Kunzel Queen City Advocate Award from Cincinnati USA Convention and Visitors Bureau. In 1998 the Chorus earned the Irma Lazarus Award from the Ohio Arts Council's annual Governor's Awards for the Arts.



May Festival Youth Chorus

Now in its 29th year, the May Festival Youth Chorus provides the opportunity for high school students to rehearse and perform challenging choral repertoire in a demanding artistic environment. The group of roughly 40 students, led by director James Bagwell, rehearses weekly and currently represents over 20 area high schools. They have become an integral part of the annual Festival and routinely perform

with the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestras.

In addition, the Youth Chorus introduces the power of great choral music to residents through more than 30 performances each year at churches and arts centers, in ArtsWave events and across the region. Not only does the training and experience provided through the chorus build upon the students' existing musical training, for many of these talented and passionate young vocalists the Youth Chorus is the only music education they are able to access.

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra is a dynamic ensemble of some of the world's finest musicians. The sixth oldest symphony orchestra in the U.S. and the oldest orchestra in Ohio, the CSO has played a leading role in the cultural life of Greater Cincinnati and the Midwest since its founding in 1895. Louis Langrée began his tenure as CSO's thirteenth Music Director at the start of the 2013-14 season.

About the May Festival

Established in 1873, the May Festival is directly responsible for the development of Cincinnati's modern music life. Music Hall, the city's primary concert venue, was built specifically to house the Festival's performance. The prestigious roster of Festival Music Directors has included, among others, Theodore Thomas, Max Rudolf, James Levine and, currently, James Conlon.

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The May Festival gratefully acknowledges support from the following:



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